DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 388 432 PS 023 751

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TITLE The School without Walls: A Nursery School of the Air.
PUB DATE Sep 95
NOTE 9p.; Paper presented at the European Conference on the Quality of Early Childhood Education (5th, Paris, France, September 7-9, 1995).
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Educational Innovation; *Educational Television; Foreign Countries; Nursery Schools; *Preschool Education; Program Descriptions; Program Implementation; *Programming (Broadcast)
IDENTIFIERS Internet; United Kingdom

ABSTRACT

This paper describes the proposed School Without Walls program in the United Kingdom, a television-centered project which is designed to deliver high quality nursery (preschool) education direct to children at a fraction of the cost of traditional educational television programming. The daily programs will present a selection of practical learning activities for children ages 2 through 5, suitable for use by individual parents or family day care providers. The program format consists of taped segments from an actual day nursery classroom with preschool children, teachers, visiting experts, and parents participating. The paper discusses possibilities for the implementation of the School Without Walls project, including supporting publications and the adaption of the project for transmission over the Internet via the World Wide Web. Brief biographies of the individuals and organizations behind the project are included. (MDM)

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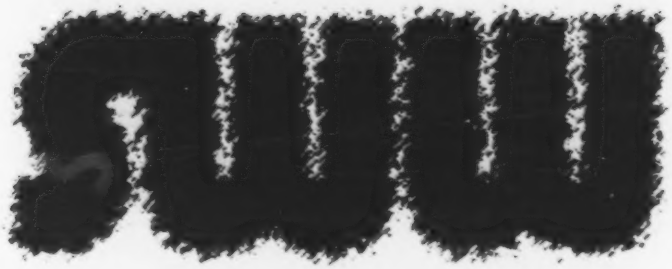

The School Without Walls
A Nursery School of the Air

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The School Without Walls is a unique television-centred project which will deliver high quality nursery education direct to children in every home with a television at a fraction of the cost of traditional educational television programming. The School Without Walls Centre, from where these programmes are made, offers an opportunity to provide a high quality nursery centre and community focus in an area of need.

The School Without Walls is essentially an education service for the home.

- It is designed for families with children of two to four / five year olds.
- It is designed to be used in the home by individual parents and others who care for young children.
- It can also be used, within the home for a small group of pre-school children of friends or neighbours.
- Its has the flexibility to be used in a structured way or informally.

In addition, the School Without Walls can be used to support and enrich the experience provided by existing play groups, day nurseries and child care facilities, in much the same way as is done by existing successful schools programming. The School Without Walls can be sued by these services to extend their educational content, confident in the knowledge that this is being done according to an appropriate educational curriculum.

The programmes will present a carefully planned selection of practical learning activities for two to five year olds, following a curriculum prepared by a panel of recognised experts in the field of Early Years learning.

Linked to this will be practical guidance for parents and carers, helping them to develop their parenting skills and assisting them in making the most of this opportunity to guide their children successfully through an important developmental stage.

The daily television programmes will be supported by a range of nursery education packs, books, audio cassettes, videos and interactive materials in order to extend the educational benefits of the programmes.

The core of the School Without Walls is a uniquely equipped, permanent nursery school and care centre - a centre of educational excellence for pre-school education. This centre will be specially designed and built to provide a rich and lively environment for the children attending and the audience to 'visit' with areas for different activities, both internal and external. The school is staffed by several teacher / presenters and a full complement of nursery nurses and ancillary staff.

The School Without Walls Programmes And Broadcasting Opportunities

The School Without Walls Centre will include fully-equipped television production facilities for the production of the School Without Walls broadcasts.

The daily programmes will deliver first class education through play. Following a curriculum specially formulated for the school and the series by our advisors, these will be led by specialist teacher / presenters. Each programme will be recorded 'as live' in the school and led by the teacher / presenters working with regularly attending children and their parents. There will also be visiting experts and guest groups of children and parents from other local pre-school groups as well as inserts showing other children around the country participating in the programme. The children at home will become familiar with the school, its gardens and playgrounds, the children and all their activities.
Parents and carers will learn education techniques and parenting skills as the real day to day events unfold, together with the planned learning experiences. The environment will be designed in such a way that the programme making has no invasive or detrimental effect on the children's education.

The programmes use an experiential approach designed to encourage practical work at home during, and outside of, the broadcasts. In this way a wide range of cognitive, emotional and physical learning experiences can be introduced. These programmes will incorporate sections designed for parents and carers which will explore child development and give guidance on education and care skills. For example:

For children:

- Pre-reading, writing and language skills
- Maths skills
- Exploration and investigation skills
- Social and moral development
- Aesthetic development
-

For parents:

- Child development
- Education development
- Language development
- Health care and safety issues

Each programme is split up into a number of discrete sections. Each of these delivers a range of activities for the children which fall into the following categories:

- Specific learning activities in pre-reading or maths. These are designed for the viewers to join in with.
- Story times where the teachers read and present an illustrated story both to the children in the school and to those at home.
- Songs and rhymes where the viewers join in making music with the teachers and children at school.
- Short documentary film stories about life outside of the school.
- Visiting artists, musicians, Theatre In Education projects and story tellers.
- Visiting community employees from organisations such as the fire and police services.
- Practical 'make and do' and 'exploration and investigation' activities which can be continued alongside, and after, viewing the rest of the broadcast.

The format and style of the television programmes is very different from those found in existing educational television programmes. Most of these are designed in a way that attempts to capture the viewer's undivided attention for the duration of the programme. The School Without Walls programme format is designed to encourage the opposite. It is constructed around the concept of Divided Attention. This programme structure allows the viewers, both children and parents, to share their time between the television and the real activities that the programmes encourage. It develops an active approach to watching television.

In addition to the daily television programmes aimed at children and adults together, The School Without Walls and the material it produces will be an invaluable resource for those training to become nursery teachers as well as for educationalists focusing on Early Years development.

The School Without Walls has also undertaken preliminary research on broadcast avenues other than the major terrestrial broadcasters in the UK. There will be a rapid expansion of broadcast outlets from developments such as satellite transmissions, cable TV distribution and digital television technology which will significantly increase the number of channels delivered. These options are being explored as possible means of broadcasting the School Without Walls.

Report From The Educational Consultants Group

The two most recent UK Government reports, Educational Provision for the Under Five's (HMSO, 1989, 1994) and Starting with Quality (HMSO, 1990) both emphasise the importance of working with families to support children's learning. The most recent report on the under five's was an independent inquiry held over two years ago by the Royal Society for the Arts (Start Right: The Importance of Early Learning, RSA, 1994) into the value of early learning. This report also emphasised the importance of parents and the learning that takes place in the home.

Provision for the under fives in the UK takes a variety of forms through public, private and voluntary sector care and education establishments. These range from education nursery settings to playgroups and family daycare. In all of these contexts the role of the parents as the child's first educator is valued.

The government have recently introduced a policy whereby the parents of all 4 year old children will be given vouchers which will purchase some form of pre-school education. There are obvious problems for children living in sparsely populated areas where there is no pre-school education available. Interest has been expressed by the Department for Education & Employment in the possibility of the School Without Walls providing such provision on a daily basis, and the vouchers used to purchase support material.

Professionals seek to develop partnerships with parents in order to establish and extend the continuity and progression in learning that is so vital for the child between the home and early childhood setting. However, the vast majority of children under five, especially under threes, are already cared for and 'educated' at home and early childhood education and care experts are eager to recognise the learning that takes place in the home. The School Without Walls will make a major contribution to supporting parents in their role as educators within the home, especially in areas where there is little under fives provision, for example in rural areas. The School Without Walls can provide many of the advantages of an appropriate curriculum, normally only available to children in nurseries, with the added advantage of a one-to-one adult/child ratio at home.

Four key statements on the Curriculum.

1. In developing a nursery curriculum the needs of the child are paramount. There must be no compromise for any reason to jeopardise meeting the individual child's needs. The main areas of experience through which these needs may be met are aesthetic, emotional, intellectual, moral, physical, social and spiritual development.
2. The nursery curriculum is not planned as a preparation for another phase of education, it is important in its own right and is the foundation on which all other learning is built. The child's first educators are the parents and they (or the carer) must continue to play a key role as partners if the education is to be fully effective.
3. Young children learn through play and first-hand experience. Through play, which is carefully planned with appropriate adult involvement, young children gain knowledge, understanding, skills and attitudes essential to their whole development.
4. Assessment and record keeping are an essential ingredient of good nursery education. This can only be effectively achieved through careful observation of individual children on a day to day basis.

The following important areas need to be covered in addressing Special Educational Needs within The School Without Walls:

1. Access
2. Adaptations to the Curriculum
3. Availability of a rich Early Years Curriculum
4. A happy and successful integration into the world of school
5. High quality monitoring and assessment procedures

Supporting Publications and Packs

All of the activities in The School Without Walls are designed to use readily available, low cost materials of the type that can be found in virtually every home. To help parents in the preparation and follow-up to both child and parent-centred activities, the School Without Walls will publish a Parent Guide at regular intervals. The use of modern colour desk top publishing technology will enable this to be published at an affordable price. It will include details of the curriculum followed in the programmes along with guidance and instructions on all of the practical activities shown during the broadcasts and a wide range of extension and follow up activities. There will also be sections on child development issues and specially written guides to practical parenting.

The School Without Walls will also produce an extensive range of packs to support and enable a wider range of practical work done in the home. The principal one is the Home Nursery Starter Pack, which includes a wide range of the basic materials and tools that children will need to carry out the activities. For example paints, paper, drawing materials, sewing and construction materials). This pack is designed for those who have limited time to search and collect the necessary items described in the Parent Guide but are in a position to buy them in an organised form. This will be supplemented by packs containing resources and guidance for specific activities (for example, seasonal or holiday activities)

School Without Walls on the Internet

Another possibility that is being explored by The School Without Walls is adapting the concept for adapting the School Without Walls for the Internet. The Internet is a giant world wide digital network, comprising many thousands of computers which are all connected together in such a way that anybody who has access to a personal computer and a telephone line can look at the information contained on any other computer, anywhere in the world. Many different types of information are carried by the Internet, probably the best known, and fastest growing, is the World Wide Web (WWW). This is a system that allows the low cost electronic publishing of almost any kind of information on the Internet, making it available to more than 30 million people in many countries. Using the WWW the School Without Walls can publish text, graphics, audio, discussion forums, databases, order forms, software and even limited video, all the media needed to deliver a high quality educational resource to parents of 2 to 4 year olds all over the world.

The nursery network is a commercial *pay as you use* service. The aim is to deliver high quality educational support material for parents to use with their children at home, at an affordable price. Using the computer, parents can search the nursery network and compile activity sheets and other information according to their children's needs, and then print them out for practical use. The material is designed by the leading educationalists for pre school children and the nursery network offers a unique service that can't be matched by any other published product or television programme. The nursery network connects people together in a way that they can talk to each other and to educational experts in an interactive way.

Support for The School Without Walls

The School Without Walls has received enthusiastic support from individuals and organisations in all of the disciplines which are key to its successful development and operation. In particular, recognised experts in the fields of early years education , in broadcasting and in politics have endorsed the School Without Walls concept and, in many cases, are helping to realise its aims.

The School Without Walls has had a positive response from those in government bodies concerned with Early Years care and education. We also have had positive interest from the Chief Executive of the Teacher Training Agency, Anthea Millett and Norma Empringham of the Schools Curriculum Assessment Authority, responsible for drafting curriculum guidelines for Key Stage 1.

Both the BBC and Channel Four, two of the UK's major terrestrial broadcasters, have responded with interest to our proposals and have asked to be kept informed of the progress of the project.

We have visited a wide range of nurseries and early years provision centres in Britain and from these we have had very positive feedback about the School Without Walls project. The project has also obtained the support of research groups investigating educational provision for the Under 5's.

Most importantly, educational experts, led by Rosemary Peacocke (see below) have examined the concept and concluded that, properly constructed and delivered, it can make a powerful contribution to young children, their carers and, through them, to the nation.

We have also had a considerable amount of interest from individuals and organisations concerned with early years education in South Africa and USA who can see in the School Without Walls a model for expanding early years education to those who do not have access to nurseries and centres.

The People behind The School Without Walls

Robin Mudge is the originator of The School Without Walls. He spent 5 years teaching in a variety of Inner London Education Authority Schools. He joined the BBC in 1980 and worked as a producer in the Continuing Education Department on the Computer Literacy Project. This project in vented the BBC Micro and introduced personal computing to the UK.

After a spell with Tomorrow's World, Robin joined the School Television Department where he originated and made a number of award winning series including TECHNO and SHORT-CIRCUIT. More recently he worked on the BBC Primary Science Initiative as the Series Editor for a £6 million television project, producing over one hundred programmes for 5 to 11 year olds.

Bob Gunn brings extensive experience of business finance and administration to The School Without Walls. This is linked to a long standing interest and involvement in local education.

In 25 years with British Petroleum, Bob became General Manager of Business Financial Services. His career also included project management, organisational change, total quality management and extensive involvement in BP's education activities.

He is a School Governor of a state primary school in Surrey and established and chaired the Finance and Communication Committees.

Rosemary Peacocke is the principal educational consultant and chair person of the Education Consultative Group for The School Without Walls. She has a highly distinguished career in education, specialising in the education of young children. Rosemary is currently Specialist Advisor to the Parliamentary Select Committee for Education. She is also a lecturer in Early Years and Primary Education and visiting Professor in Child Development.

Rosemary's career has involved her as a Head Teacher of an Infant school, Staff Inspector for Primary Education, with national responsibility for the Education of Young Children and President of TACTYC (Tutors of Advanced Courses for Teachers of Young Children) and BAECE (British Association of Early Childhood Education).

Other members of the Educational Consultative Group are:

Iram Siraj-Blatchford - Senior Lecturer in Early Childhood Education at the London Institute of Education.
Chris Pascal - Professor in Early Years Education and President of BAECE.
Judith Petterson - Chief Educational Psychologist in Surrey, UK.

Open Mind Productions supplies production management and post production resources to The School Without Walls. The company was formed in 1989 and specialises in both production and post production of high quality educational programmes for UK Broadcasters. The company was set up by Chris Ellis and Roland Tongue both of who had previously worked as members of staff within BBC television.

Working as an independent producer Open Mind has produced more than 50 programmes for both BBC and Channel Four's School Television service. The Earth in Space, produced in 1993 for Channel Four, was nominated for the Basel European Television Prize and for the Royal Television Society award.

Stephen Pollock is a consultant to The School Without Walls. He is advising on the design and production of the Publications and Packs. He is an accomplished writer of children's educational resources and books. Stephen is currently the Commissioning Editor in the Educational Development Department of BBC Education. He is responsible for initiating and assessing the educational and market value of projects, drawing up marketing strategies, commissioning authors and designers and overseeing the production of the project.

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